

by the EPA and would be established in statute under CEPA.) The EPA, along with other government agencies, would also conduct studies to identify the environmental pollutants (and their unhealthy constituents) commonly used or found in areas that are "reasonably accessible to children"—areas such as homes, schools, day-care centers, malls, movie theaters, and parks—and establish guidelines to help reduce and eliminate exposure of children to environmental pollutants in such areas.

CEPA would expand the Toxics Release Inventory to include releases of certain substances that are believed to pose special risks to children, such as lead and mercury. The EPA would be charged with identifying other toxic chemicals that may be especially dangerous to children for inclusion on the inventory.

Under CEPA, the EPA would publish a list of "safer-for-children" substances and products as well as a list of environmental chemicals that are known, likely, or suspected to cause adverse health effects in children. Both of these lists would be available to the public and would name household products in all different categories that present the minimum risk to children. According to David Sandretti, Boxer's communications director, the EPA would be allowed considerable latitude in composing the list in terms of what items to include and how to verify their safety, whether through existing science or through supplementary new studies. The bill also calls for the creation of a family information kit with information on how to minimize children's exposures to toxic substances.

The Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN), a nonpartisan research and education consortium based in Emeryville, California, has worked closely with Boxer and Lautenberg in crafting the bill. The CEHN has prepared an analysis of the legislation that is available on their Web site at <http://www.cehn.org/>. The analysis notes a number of positive features of the bill including its emphasis on health in standard-setting and its endorsement of much-needed research. Carol Stroebel, health policy consultant for the CEHN, says, "This bill will go a long way toward instituting the kind of protections that we need for children's health."



Accessing Autoimmunity

As the body's police force, the human immune system has an astoundingly difficult job. When viruses, bacteria, and other microbes break into the body each day, the immune system must recognize and apprehend each of them. This involves producing specific molecules that will mark each invading microbe for destruction and then calling the correct cells into action to annihilate it. Such a complicated task necessitates a terrifically complex system, and that complexity also means there are many things that can go wrong. When the immune system becomes confused and directs its considerable force against the cells of the body instead of invaders, the result is often an autoimmune disease.

Few autoimmune diseases can be cured. For the millions of Americans who have developed lupus, type 1 diabetes, or any other of the 80 suspected autoimmune diseases, that is the bad news. The good news is that there are groups like the American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association (AARDA, pronounced "ARD ah") that are working to coordinate an all-out attack on autoimmune illnesses while helping those who have such diseases understand and live with them. The association disseminates the latest information on these diseases through its site on the World Wide Web, located at <http://www.aarda.org/>.

For some people with autoimmune disease, it is difficult to understand how such diverse disorders as a leading cause of blindness in Asia (Behçet disease), a chronic gastrointestinal disease (Crohn disease), a debilitating nerve disorder (multiple sclerosis), and a common skin disease (psoriasis) can be related. Indeed, for many years, physicians approached each of these diseases separately, not realizing they all may be caused by autoimmunity.

To learn more about these diseases and how the immune system causes them, visitors to the AARDA home page can follow the Q&A link, which contains general information about autoimmunity, or the Disease Information link, which contains brief descriptions of 59 different autoimmune diseases. Further information can be ordered from AARDA by clicking the Request Information button at the bottom of each description. (Although the information is free, a donation is requested.) The AARDA site also discusses why most of these diseases are more likely to strike women than men. By some estimates, nearly 75% of all autoimmune patients are female, and visitors to the AARDA site can read about some of the possible reasons for this by following the Autoimmunity and Women's Health link on the home page.

Recent advances in explaining this and other mysteries of autoimmune reactions can be found in AARDA's newsletter or by following the links labeled Press Releases and Research Reports on the AARDA home page. Though AARDA's full newsletter is available only through paid subscription, some of the articles from past issues are provided on the AARDA site and can be accessed by clicking the newspaper icon on the home page. Included under the Press Releases link are articles about recent research breakthroughs, such as the discovery of a gene that predisposes people to lupus, and other resources including a free book about lupus that can be ordered from AARDA using a form linked to the Press Releases page. Included under the Research Reports link are articles on topics such as the use of stem cells to generate new liver tissue, the efficacy of new autoimmune vaccines, and the etiology of diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis. Updates on research grants and clinical trials are also available here.

Besides providing this information to the public, AARDA also lobbies legislators to make more grants and resources available for autoimmune research. In 1998, the group helped persuade leaders to create a coordinating body for autoimmune research within the National Institutes of Health. Information on these activities can be found by following the Advocacy link on the home page. The group also sends updates by e-mail to those who join its advocacy mailing list by filling in the form at the bottom of the Advocacy page. Also here (and on the home page) is a link to AARDA's Congress Connect page, which lists contact information, including e-mail links, for every member of Congress.

For people unfamiliar with the technical language in some of the articles on AARDA's site, a list of terms is provided via the Glossary on the home page. Definitions for dozens of words are listed on AARDA's Glossary page, and there is also a form for requesting information about terms not listed.



American Autoimmune
Related Diseases Association, Inc.
<http://www.aarda.org/>